

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“During that tussle, it’s possible my hand could have hit her face. But it was not an intentional slap.” — Ranjit Kaur, teacher-in-charge, Lakshmi Bai College, facing charges that she slapped Dr Neelam, a colleague who insisted on reading a resolution before signing it.

OIL PALM CULTIVATION

Rs 11,040-cr scheme has the industry salivating

Edible oil industry welcomed the Union government’s new scheme aimed at promoting cultivation of oil palm on a large scale with financial support for growers and extractors.

The ‘national mission on edible oils (oil palm)’ envisages 6.5 lakh hectares under cultivation in five years, going up to 10 lakh hectares by 2030.

The scheme will have a financial outlay of Rs 11,040 crore, which will be used to protect farmers from price volatility through a viability price support, and also provide Rs 29,000 per hectare for providers of oil palm planting material; Rs. 80 lakh per 15 hectares of seed gardens; and Rs 5 crore for 5thp-capacity processing plants in the Northeast and the Andamans. A special assistance of



Rs 250 per plant would be paid to those replanting old gardens.

Sanjay Goenka, president, Oil Palm Developers and Processors Association, said the scheme would have a positive impact on the sector. It would make it “viable for the industry to continue to contribute towards becoming self-sufficient in edible oil requirements.”

Godrej Agrovet managing director Balram Singh Yadav

said, “Since it is a long-gestation crop, initial improved support to the farmers will encourage quicker adoption and sustainability of this crop.”

The transparent price mechanism based on the last five years average will ring-fence farmers from price volatility, he added.

Yoga celebrity Ramdev’s Patanjali group-led Ruchi Soya has already announced plans to start oil palm plantations in Assam, Tripura and other North-Eastern states.

The company has already done field surveys for the palm oil plantations which will be set up through contracts that guarantee farmers a buy-back by Ruchi Soya’s processing plants to be set up in those states.

Ruchi’s planned foray into palm oil comes on the back of a 44.42% increase in palm oil prices in the retail market in July compared to the previous year.

India currently has palm oil plantations in Assam, Tripura, West Bengal, Andamans, Gujarat, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

Asked about biodiversity concerns involved in monoculture plantations, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said an assessment by the Indian Institute of Oil Palm Research had found 28 lakh hectares across the country which could be safely used for oil palm cultivation. Less than four lakh hectares are currently planted with oil palm. (Sources: BusinessLine, Mint and The Hindu)

5Ws&1H

CJI upset over news of new judges

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana said on Wednesday that he was extremely upset over news reports about the Supreme Court collegium recommending certain names for the Supreme Court before the list was officially announced. He said such reports can harm individual careers of judges.

LPG cylinder price hiked by Rs 25

Union government yesterday increased the price of domestic cooking gas by ₹25 per cylinder — the second straight month of increase in rates. A cylinder now costs over Rs 900 in Hyderabad.

SC allows women to take NDA exam

The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed eligible women to take the examination for admission to National Defence Academy (NDA) scheduled to be held on September 5. The court, however, said that the result of the examination would be subject to final adjudication of the petition.

Sedition case against MP

UP police booked a case of sedition against Samajwadi Party MP Shafiqur Rahman Barq for allegedly drawing a parallel between India’s independence struggle and the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. He was charged with deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings and promote enmity between different groups.

TS calls it an end to second wave

The second wave of Covid-19 has come to an end in Telangana, going by the rate at which the virus is reproducing itself.

However, a large number of unvaccinated eligible people, lack of Covid appropriate behaviour, and a new variant could trigger a third wave, said Dr. G. Srinivasa Rao, Director of Public Health.

Currently, large gatherings for celebrations, and crowd at food outlets, were being witnessed again.

“If R factor (reproductive number of virus), new cases reported, daily positivity rate, and hospital admissions, are considered, we can say that the COVID situation is under control. The R Factor value is 0.7%. We should be worried if it is above 1%. The positivity rate is 0.5%,” said Dr. Srinivasa at a press conference at the Health campus on Wednesday.

At the peak of the second wave, 1,01,22 cases were detected on April 26. Over a lakh samples were tested in a day during that time, and the number of COVID patients in ICUs crossed 4,100.

‘Disha’ encounter case inches ahead



Supreme Court-constituted Justice Sirpurkar Commission into encounter killings by the Cyberabad police of four persons, accused of gang rape and murder of a young veterinary doctor in December 2019 — has completed the collection of records and is moving onto evidence recording phase. As many as 1,333 affidavits from the general public, 103 affidavits from the police officials, witnesses, doctors and other government officials were received. (TH)

Facebook set to launch digital currency

Facebook is ready to launch its digital wallet, according to David Marcus, the man who spearheaded the social media group’s move into digital currencies.

In a memo yesterday, Marcus said that Novi, a digital currency wallet that will be integrated into Facebook apps, was “ready to come to market”, adding that it had secured licences or regulatory approvals in “nearly every” US state.

The wallet would offer free person-to-person payments domestically and internationally, he said, and Facebook would also be able to offer “cheaper merchant payments to businesses” through Novi while still making a profit on merchant services, once it had a “meaningful customer base”.Facebook declined to give more details on the precise timing of a launch.

Marcus, who currently heads up Face-book’s financial services arm F2, is one of the co-creators of Diem, a project announced in 2019 that initially sought to create a synthetic cryptocurrency backed by a basket of currencies. The project is backed by 26 businesses and non-profits, including Facebook, which designed Novi to hold Diem coins.

In the wake of concerns from regulators that such a coin could threaten monetary stability and facilitate money laundering, Diem dramatically scaled down its vision to instead focus on launching a single stablecoin backed one-for-one by the dollar. But stablecoins are also now facing heightened regulatory scrutiny, after the total value in circulation more than quadrupled this year to \$120bn.

(Financial Times)

COVID-19 TREATMENT

‘Ayush-64 no different from the standard course’

A herbal formulation promoted by India’s ayurveda ministry as a remedy against mild and moderate Covid-19 and included in its clinical management protocols has no beneficial effect against the infection, new research has suggested.

Doctors at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Jodhpur, have found no differences in the course of Covid-19 infections or viral clearance between patients who received the formulation, Ayush-64, and those who had received standard care.

Their study found that while the formulation was safe and had no adverse effects, there were no significant differences in the fever patterns, respiratory

symptoms or key blood test measurements between patients who had received Ayush-64 and those on standard care.

“Ayush-64 has no significant beneficial effect” compared with the standard care, Jaykaran Charan, associate professor of pharmacology at AIIMS, Jodhpur, and his colleagues said in their study, not peer-reviewed yet but posted on Wednesday on medRxiv, an online preprint server.

The findings appear to contradict the results of an earlier study led by the Centre for Rheumatic Diseases, Pune, which had suggested that Ayush-64 “hastened recovery, reduced hospitalisation, and improved

overall health in mild and moderate Covid-19” when given with standard care.

The AIIMS study had 60 patients while the earlier study tracked 140 patients.

The earlier positive results and the new negative results, the AIIMS doctors said, underlined the need for validating the efficacy of Ayush-64 against Covid-19 through a rigorous “double-blind” trial with a large sample of patients.

A double-blind study is one in which neither the patients nor the doctors know who is receiving Ayush-64 and who is receiving standard care and are intended to minimise any bias or placebo effects. (The Telegraph)